

DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF EDUCATIONAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The design of successful policies and their implementation through continuous development and modernization strategy, can ensure the permanence of institutions on educational market. Financial crunch, development of educational alternatives require promotion of modern systems for proper activity, as well as orientation towards marketing in order to provide appropriate educational services that fulfill the interests on an individual level as well as economy's needs. In these circumstances, institutions have to develop and promote educational marketing strategies, using at the most of its capability the existing opportunities and resources in order to be as competitive as possible and to comply with the market competition.

KEYWORDS: *education market, educational marketing, marketing strategy, strategic planning, services, goals, development*

In its development, every organization formulates its own policy, which sets the main prospective aims and specific modalities for their realization. It is these correctly developed and successfully implemented policies that contribute to ensuring the organization's permanence on the market and its general development.

For the development of educational institutions the educational market increasingly applies a marketing policy that offers the former a chance to promptly and really perceive market signals and allows them to rapidly and most efficiently adapt to the changes that occur on the market and to the requirements of the society in general. Consequently, the institution correctly evaluates market parameters, especially the categories of beneficiaries of educational services and their expectations, and resources available to meet the real demand, identifies uncovered market segments and comparative advantages to competitors.

In the present situation, educational institutions cannot afford to work without a clear perspective, both short- and long-term, that would guarantee their operation, rationality and efficiency in an increasingly complex and dynamic environment. All of the above form the concept of marketing policy, which integrates the mission, general options, principles, norms and activities that ensure capitalization of the institution's potential in line with requirements.

To achieve the general developmental goals, the options and elements defining the institution, the latter should apply a unitary and coherent system of strategies, tactics and specific action programs.

The educational marketing strategies can include all the elements and aspects of the field:

- (1) education market;
- (2) education services;
- (3) consumers.

The choice of a marketing strategy is an important step in the activity of any organization, which marks the end of the process that defines its mission and goals, on the basis of a thorough and appropriate analysis of the general situation in the field and of the particular situation of a certain organization.

A strategy is formed from a collection of specific objectives set for a certain period of time, of means and methods used to accomplish them, expressing the tendencies and requirements needed to reach the fixed targets.

Usually long-, middle- and short-term strategies are developed with specific, defined, realistic objectives that are detailed through relevant tactics. In this manner institutions respond to the immediate requirements of changes in the environment and initiate a long-term approach, which allows a unitary, coherent and prospective vision.

A marketing strategy should serve as a basis for formulation of an institution's decisions aimed at improving its performance. In this sense the marketing strategy shall reflect the most important aspects of the organization's activity:



Figure 1 Components of a marketing strategy

Successful strategies are those that identify market opportunities and competitive advantages on the basis of SWOT analysis results, which show the institution's strengths and weaknesses and elicit the existing risks and opportunities. Their implementation should create such a system of relations between the institution and the environment that would ensure its most favorable position in confrontation with other competitors.

Also, a successful strategy involves adoption of the most correct and relevant decisions regarding consumers of education services and modalities used to meet their needs.

Besides SWOT, another instrument used for the management analysis of needs is PEST (E), i.e. the analysis of the political, economic, social and technologic complexes, which have lately been supplemented with the ecological complex in which the institution operates.

The key elements of a marketing strategy should indicate the basic targets pursued for a certain period, clarifying, at the same time, answers to some fundamental questions:

- (1) What education products/services will be created and provided?
- (2) Which segment(s) of the education market will be targeted by the products/services?
- (3) Which will be, if applicable, the price of these products/services?
- (4) How will each individual product/service be distributed?
- (5) What, when and in what manner is communicated to market segment(s)? etc.

The efficiency of a strategy depends on the accomplishment of several requirements that would ensure a perfect harmony with marketing goals and functions [7, p.483]:

- (1) maintenance of a correspondence between actions and results;
- (2) achievement of a close connection between producers/providers and beneficiaries;
- (3) rapid adaptation to market requirements;
- (4) creation of conditions for permanent receipt of operative information about market configuration, requirements and tendencies in its evolution, etc.

Marketing strategies are first of all aimed at attaining and maintaining competitive advantages, which becomes a serious concern for institutions in an increasingly complex competition-oriented environment. In this regard, the starting point is determining the competitive position by means of analysis (audit), which provides a basis for setting strategic objectives, the latter representing a formal statement of the pursued goal, which defines the institution's mission. Setting objectives is an undisputable necessity, as it contributes to providing a direction for activity, increasing performance, avoiding waste of resources (time, people, money, etc.), preventing mistakes. For these reasons, every objective should combine certain parameters: certainty and measurability, horizon for prevision, possibility of implementation with increased efficiency, rapid and efficient adaptability to changes [7, p.483].

Marketing objectives derive from the institution's general objectives. Basis for determination of strategic objectives is the identification of consumers' needs,

analyzed in terms of three dimensions, whose combination may serve as support for formulating the institution's mission:

- (1) group of consumers determined according to various criteria: demographic, geographic, social status, etc.;
- (2) consumers' needs;
- (3) technologies applied.

An educational marketing strategy should contain *general objectives* (e.g., ensuring performance and efficiency of institutional structures, linking professional education to requirements of workforce market, developing educational partnerships, etc.), detailed in operational objectives (e.g., revision/update of analytical programs, organization of internships, conclusion of contracts with businesses, etc.).

The success in attaining strategic objectives, however specific and realistic, is primarily determined by adequate means for their implementation, highly important in reaching the pursued goals.

Development of a marketing strategy is an extensive and permanent process of information search, analysis and decision-making, a methodical process of finding optimum solutions to identified problems. The recent decades have seen a development of numerous concepts, theories, techniques that contribute to formulating strategies, whose synthesis defines *strategic planning*, which formulates long-term objectives and strategies for a company or strategic activity, by linking resources to existing opportunities, pursuing thus identification and achievement of specific objectives, attainment of a desired position, reduction of risks, errors, and discovery of the best solutions for obtaining maximum advantages [6].

The process of strategic planning is a subject that is frequently addressed in specialized literature, with every author trying to present the stages of the process in their logical order: [1, 2, 3, 6]. An acceptable formula, which seems the most complete and at the same time the most simple and realistic to be practiced, is the one suggested by M. McDonald, who introduces the following *main stages*: [6, p.73]:

- (1) defining the mission: the area that should be covered by all planning activities;
- (2) assessing the situation: analysis of internal and external factors;
- (3) setting preliminary and performance objectives: based on previous performance and initial forecasts, with corrections imposed by actual achievements;
- (4) strategic development: identification and evaluation of strategic options and selection of the most adequate;
- (5) implementation: defined action program, functional budgets and time schedules;
- (6) monitoring the activity: by taking into account the goals pursued.

Each stage has its role in choosing the best strategy for the current work of institutions and for founding future strategies.

Strategic planning can also be seen as a cyclical process, given the periodical progression of stages and the need for reviewing, updating and permanently adapting institutional strategies.

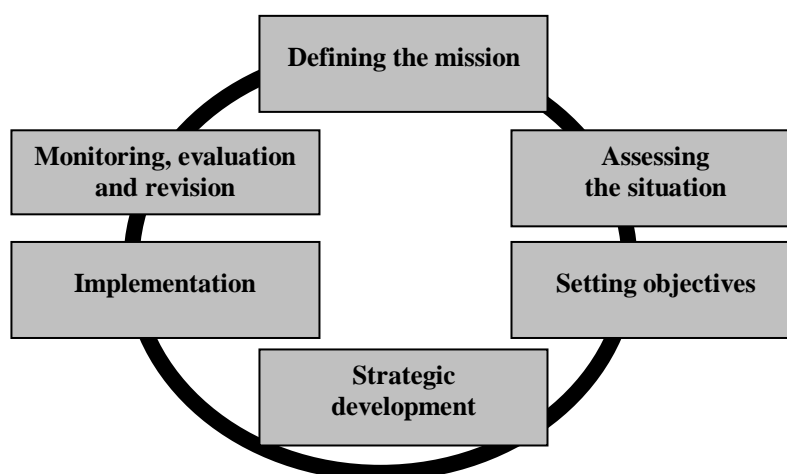


Figure 2 Stages of strategic planning

Concerns related to the realization of an analytical framework for determining the marketing strategy have resulted in the development of models to which other sciences, such as sociology, economy, and strategic management, have contributed as well. Thus, various strategic models have been enforced, while in practice an almost infinite number of variants can be applied due to the multitude of aspects that should be considered when establishing the above.

Based on theoretical approaches regarding the direct or indirect response of businesses/organizations to the environment, applicable in the educational environment as well, several types of strategies can be defined depending on a number of criteria: deliberate strategies, emergency strategies, functional strategies, common strategies, differentiated strategies, etc. [4, p.272-273].

The choice of a successful strategy depends largely on the ability of the manager, the management team, and the institution as a whole to interpret their environment and to arrange their work so as to obtain maximum advantage from the existing opportunities, assuming that the marketing strategy should place the institution into a more competitive position on the market. The key role in developing policies and strategies certainly belongs to the institutional structures responsible for marketing. This activity is the task of the subdivisions responsible for quality management. It cannot be, however, attributed exclusively to the above-mentioned structures, as both the objectives of the marketing policy and strategies and the implementation means and tools are connected and interdependent with the other components of the institutional policy: management, resources, etc.

An institution should choose its strategy depending on the goals it pursues, combining strategic alternatives according to its interests and possibilities and to specific market conditions, adopting thus a complex, synthetic strategy, which is essentially a set of variants. The projected objectives shall be achieved by applying the main functions of the educational marketing:

- (1) identification of social needs;
- (2) correlation of educational programs with social needs;
- (3) identification and fulfillment of individual educational goals and options;
- (4) continuous assessment of the educational system, which ensures that demand is efficiently met on the basis of identification of needs and their dynamics.

In conclusion, we find that educational marketing aims at developing and implementing educational strategies and programs through their proper evaluation and continuous redesign with a view to correlating the formation of the young generation with society interests and needs and with the development of human personality.

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